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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 000649

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR REES ADVOCATES U.S. HUMAN DIGNITY AGENDA

Classified By: Political Counselor Scott Bellard, reasons 1.4(b) and (d)
)

¶1. (SBU) Summary. During his February 14-15 visit to the Philippines, Ambassador Grover Joseph Rees, Special Representative for Social Issues, advocated the U.S. Government human dignity agenda in meetings with the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs, members of the Philippine House of Representatives, leaders of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, and health officials. Ambassador Rees focused particularly on spreading awareness of Burma's use of rape as an instrument of armed conflict, on U.S. efforts to reduce maternal and child mortality rates, mobilizing UN human rights agencies to have a greater practical impact, and drumming up support for U.S. efforts in regional and UN fora. End Summary.

DFA ADHERES TO ASEAN CONSENSUS

¶2. (SBU) In his visit to the Department of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Rees briefed Undersecretary for Policy Erlinda Basilio, Assistant Secretary for Asian and Pacific Affairs Romeo Manalo, and Assistant Secretary for American Affairs Rey Carandang on the Burmese government's use of rape to suppress rebellious minority communities. Ambassador Rees asked that the Philippines raise the issue bilaterally with Burma or in multilateral fora, and also call for a halt to this practice. A/S Manalo requested a copy of the report on this subject.

¶3. (C) U/S Basilio noted the Philippines' traditional reluctance to support country-specific resolutions in the UN, and reiterated the Philippines' adherence to the regional preference for "engagement" and consensus. She stated that ASEAN, with the Philippines as its chair this year, is nonetheless "preparing a package" to encourage Burma to take steps that would keep it off the UN Human Rights Council's agenda. A/S Manalo added that the Philippines and other ASEAN nations are committed to pursuing confidence-building measures. He cited a plan currently under consideration to dispatch medical teams to Burma.

¶4. (SBU) Ambassador Rees also sought Philippine support for the UN Human Rights Council resolution against religious intolerance, stressing that the resolution must be balanced and cover not only Muslims but other religions as well. Ambassador Rees promoted U.S.-sponsored resolutions against forced early marriage and female infanticide and prenatal screening for gender to be tabled at the UN Commission on the Status of Women, while recognizing that the Philippines is not a member of the Commission.

¶5. (SBU) In separate meetings with Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs for Special Concerns Rafael Seguis and with

Assistant Secretary of Foreign Affairs for United Nations and International Organizations Aladin Villacorte, Ambassador Rees reinforced these key points. He also discussed with A/S Villacorte making the United Nations' human rights and developmental assistance bodies more results-oriented.

MYANMAR CAUCUS REP PRAISES U.S.

¶6. (SBU) Ambassador Rees met with Philippine Members of Congress Etta Rosales and Mario Aguja. (Representative Rosales is an active member of the ASEAN Interparliamentary Myanmar Caucus and an outspoken critic of the Burmese junta.) Ambassador Rees briefed them on Burma's government-sanctioned rape and the narrowly-defeated UN Security Council resolution on Burma. Representative Rosales praised the United States' tough stance on Burma, and compared U.S. efforts favorably to those of the European Union.

HEALTH CARE ISSUES

¶7. (SBU) World Health Organization representative Jean-Marc Olive and Philippine National Center for Disease Prevention and Control Director Yolanda Oliveras briefed Ambassador Rees on their respective activities in the Philippines. Oliveras outlined a current Philippine Department of Health disease reduction program targeting dengue fever, HIV/AIDS, malaria, leprosy, schistosomiasis, and rabies. Department of Health efforts in child/maternal health care start with the premise that every pregnancy is "high risk" and aim to make clinics, medication, and immunization widely available. Olive lauded

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the Philippine Government's funding of various health care measures, especially relative to those of other countries in the region, but noted that, because of this, various international donor entities do not devote much-needed assistance to the Philippines.

CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

¶8. (SBU) The Ambassador met with General Secretary Juanito Figura and Spokesperson Pedro Quitariorio of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines and discussed combating AIDS in the region, maternal and child health issues, and bioethics challenges. Recognizing the CBCP as a "natural ally" in many of these areas of concern, Ambassador Rees encouraged the Monsignors to continue to be engaged on domestic issues. Monsignors Figura and Quitariorio requested Ambassador Rees' support in returning the Balanguiga Bells to the Province of Samar, which Ambassador Rees promised to explore.

¶9. (U) Ambassador Rees did not have the opportunity to clear this message.

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